

184 A

Funeral-Sermon

ON THE
Much Lamented Death

Of the late Reverend

Mr. JOHN SHOWER,

P R E A C H ' D A T

OLD-FURT, July 10. 1715.

By W. T O N G.

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1860

A

Funeral-Sermon

For the Late Reverend and Excellent

Mr. JOHN SHOWER.

2 T I M. iv. 7, 8.

I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that Day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his Appearing.



ONE would think these Words were too great to have been spoken by any Man in this World, they rather sound like the triumphant Songs of the Saints in Glory; Who is able to say, while on this side Heaven, I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course?

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BUT.

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BUT here we see the Excellency of the Grace of Faith in its Nature and Working ; it is the Evidence of Things not seen, and the Substance of Things hoped for ; it is able to possess its Object by Anticipation, and begin an Heaven upon Earth.

WHEN the Grace of Faith draws near to its Consummation, it usually partakes more and more of the Nature of Vision and Enjoyment, especially where it has been duly improved and kept in lively Exercise.

THIS blessed Apostle *Paul* tells us elsewhere; *2 Cor. xii. 1.* he remembred a Time when he saw and heard Things so inexpressibly heavenly and divine, that he knew not *whether he was in the Body or out of the Body*; if at that Time he had broken forth into such holy Exultations as we have in the Text, we should not so much have wondered at it.

BUT to speak these Things, when he knew he had not yet attained, neither was already perfect, when he had Sufferings and Death before him, and in his View great Sufferings and a cruel Death ; this was a wonderful Instance of the Strength of his Faith, and of the extraordinary Manifestations of God to his Soul.

IT was the Apostle's declared earnest Desire that he might be conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ, both in Life and Death ; and as an Instance of that Conformity, when he *was ready to be offered up, and the Time of his Departure was at hand*, when he was to be made a Sacrifice,

not to atone divine Justice, but to confirm divine Truth, he begins his Song of Victory here, *I have fought a good Fight; thus did his Lord and Master before him, John xvii. 4. I have glorified thee on Earth, I have finished the Work thou gavest me to do, and now, O Father, glorify thou me with thy own Self, &c.*

AND indeed, when the Business of Life is well done, the Trial of Death is in a manner over; they that have nothing to do but to die, will not find dying Work so hard when it comes, as it appears to be at a Distance, the Sting of Death is gone, and the Victory falls to the Christian's Share. Let us but come well to Death, and we need not fear but that we shall go well through it: It is Christ's Work to open the Door and to let the Soul into the unseen World; and if we do not forsake him while we live, there's no Danger of his leaving us when we come to die; and if Christ be with us and for us, then Death will not be Labour or Loss, but Rest and Gain to us.

AND therefore, tho' there is something *extraordinary*, there was nothing *extravagant* in the Apostle's Joy and Triumph, he had good Reason, and the best Precedent for it; but if a Christian by the Strength of Faith and Sense of the Love of God, be able thus to rejoice when he stands upon the utmost Confines of this World, how unspeakable and full of Glory will his Joy be, when he is safe landed in Heaven? then he is joined to the victorious Saints,

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that are represented in Rev. xv. 3. as standing
on the other Shore of the great Sea, having
the Harps of God in their Hands, and singing
the Song of Moses and the Lamb.

I AM persuaded, there are none in this As-
sembly but who believe this to be the present
Happiness of that faithful Servant of God, who
is now taken from the Head of this Congre-
gation, *He has fought the good Fight, he has
finish'd his Course, he has kept the Faith, he has
reached the Mark, he has won the Prize, and
laid hold of eternal Life; it is meet we should
think so of him, it would be Injustice to him, as
well as Uncharitableness in any of us to question
it; God sealed him with the holy Spirit of Pro-
mise before he died, and gave him the Earnest
of his Inheritance, before he had the Possession
of it; he finished his Course with Joy, and the Mi-
nistry he received of the Lord Jesus, having testified
the Gospel of the Grace of God.*

IT would be injurious to Mr. Shower's Friends
and Hearers, to suppose that they need to be
told how great a Mercy they had in him, and
how great a Loss they have now of him; they
loved his Ministry while they enjoyed it, and
have done him double Honour, both in
Life and Death, that double Honour that is
due to one that laboured so much and so well
in the Word and Doctrine.

THEY have signally declared their Estimati-
on of him, and they do declare it; Mr. Shower
will not, cannot be easily forgotten by this
Congregation: I am sensible you need not have
your

your Passions artfully wrought up, nor your Sorrows urged, and pushed on by Funeral Declamations, the Flood-gates are sufficiently opened already ; may the God of Grace and Comfort turn the Streams into the right Channel, and keep them within due Bounds, and sanctify them to you, that your Hearts may be made better by the Sadness of your Countenances this Day, that this afflicting Providence may be an instructive Ordinance to you, and to us all.

AND yet methinks we cannot, we ought not to part with dear Mr. *Shower*, without dropping some Tears over his Grave, that tender, affectionate, lively Minister, that has shed so many Tears in this Pulpit, over the Souls of his People, in preaching to them, in praying for them, and in setting forth a Crucified Saviour before them ; and not in this Pulpit only, but in almost all our Assemblies in and about the City of *London*, for above five or six and Thirty Years together.

SURELY some Tribute of affectionate Sorrow, more than common, is due to the Memory of One, who for so many Years, both in Preaching and Living, had the Felicity to please as many, and displease as few, as any One that ever lived in this great and populous City, where Tempers and Sentiments are so different and so variable ; that happy Man that in his Master's Work, was all Life and Spirit ; in common Conversation, all Mildness and unaffected Modesty !

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HE is dead, we miss him, we mourn for him ; our Hands are weak this Day, here is another sad Breach made upon us ; it is but a Year and a few Days since excellent Mr. Henry was taken away from us, and now Mr. Shower is gone after him, while our former Wounds are still bleeding, and our broken Fence not yet made up ; God is going to contend with us.

Mr. Henry and Mr. Shower had kept up a long and intimate Friendship and Correspondence with each other, like Saul and Jonathan, *they were pleasant in their Lives, and in their Deaths they were not much divided* ; and consider them in the Gifts and Graces of their Ministerial Warfare, they were *swifter than Eagles*, they were *stronger than Lyons* : Weep for them then, ye Daughters of Jerusalem, they loved your Souls, and longed for your Eternal Welfare ; nay, rather weep for yourselves, and for the Churches of Christ in the Land, God is taking away your Ministers, and Men are pulling down your Meeting-Houses ; surely such Providences tell us, that notwithstanding all that God has done for us, His Anger is not turned away, but His Hand is stretched out still. .

THEY are gone, they are safely housed before the Storm comes ; they seem to look down on us, and tell us they have *fought the good Fight*, their Trials are all over, but that we who are left behind have need to be watchful and faithful, for an Hour of Temptation seems to be coming very speedily upon us.

IN

IN the Text and Context, there are two Things observable:

1. THE State and Situation the Apostle was in when he expressed himself with so much Joy and Triumph; this you will see in the Verse foregoing, *I am now ready to be offered, and the Time of my Departure is at Hand,* ~~and~~, I am anointed for the Sacrifice. Whether the Time of the Apostle's Sufferings and Martyrdom was as near as he apprehended it to be, is not certain, nor is it very material; it is sufficient that he looked upon it as very near, just at Hand; and tho' some learned Men think he lived nine or ten Years after this, yet there are others that may be as learned as they, think this was the last Epistle that *Paul* wrote, and that it was but a very little while before his Death, and that he saw the Preparations that were making at *Rome* for his Martyrdom, and was also warned of God that it would be very speedily.

2. THE Views which the Apostle had from this Situation; when Persons look Death in the Face, they see it is time to look about them; when they stand upon the Confines of both Worlds, they have a large Prospect; and happy are they, that from such a Situation have such a pleasant Prospect as the Apostle *Paul* had; for,

1. HE could look back with Comfort, and with a good Conscience upon his past Life and Ministry in the World he was leaving; *I have fought the good Fight.* And,

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2. HE could look forward with Confidence, and holy Joy, to the Honour and Happiness that waited for him in the World to which he was going. *Henceforth there is laid up,* &c.

BEHOLD the pleasant Prospect the Apostle had from what the World would call a melancholy Situation, to stand between the two Worlds, and look into both of them with Comfort and Confidence.

A CARNAL Mind and a guilty Conscience represent it as a fearful Thing to be doubtfully hovering between both Worlds, so as scarcely to be either in the one or in the other, almost out of the seen World, and yet not entered into the unseen World; just launching into the Ocean of Eternity, and not certainly knowing whether one shall sink or swim, be saved or lost for ever; it requires great Christian Fortitude and Firmness of Mind, to be able to say, (as I once heard a young Minister when dying) (a) *I stand upon the Brink of one World, and look into another without Amazement.*

THIS State, how awful soever it is, we shall all find ourselves in very shortly, in a dying State, upon the Confines of Time and Eternity, and we should be often thinking with ourselves, what Prospect we are then like to have; whether we can look back upon the World that we are leaving, and the Life that we are finishing, with Comfort and Satisfaction.

(a) Mr. Wilson of Warwick.

Mr. JOHN SHOWER. 9

AND whether we shall be able to look forward into the World upon which we are entering with Hope and Holy Confidence, whether we can dare to die; bid Farewel to Time, and Welcome to an unchangeable Eternity.

WORDS are wanting to express the Misery of those that in such a Posture, look back and see nothing but Sin and Guilt pursuing them; and look forward and see nothing but endless Torments waiting for them.

BUT they are happy beyond all Expression, that have the Apostle's Views at such a time:

His comfortable Retrospect; *I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith.*

AND his delightful Prospect; Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the Righteous Judge shall give me at that Day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his Appearing.

AND these now will be the two general Heads of my Discourse unto you.

I. THE Apostle's comfortable Retrospection; *I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith;* that is to say, I have done my Work, the Work that my great Lord gave me to do.

I TAKE it for granted, Paul speaks of himself here, not only as a Christian, but as a Christian Minister, a Minister of the Gospel of Christ; for tho' it be true, that every Christian, how private soever his Station be, has a Warfare to fight, a Race to run, and a Trust

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to keep; yet these Expressions are used in
Scripture, more especially to describe the Work
and Duty of a Minister of the Gospel.

THIS Apostle exhorts Timothy to endure Hardness, as a good Soldier of Jesus Christ, 2 Tim. ii. 3. He calls Archippus his Fellow-Soldier, Philemon, Ver. 2. He also applies to himself as a Minister, the Character of one that had a Race to run, 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27. *I therefore so run not as uncertainly; so fight I not as one that beateth the Air, but I keep under my Body, and bring it into Subjection, lest by any Means when I have preached to others, I my self should be a Cast-away.* And in Acts xx. 24. having mentioned the finishing of his Course, he immediately adds, *And the Ministry I have received of the Lord Jesus; the Course both of his Life and Ministry.*

AND as to the other Metaphor, keeping the Faith, or keeping the Trust, nothing is more usual in Scripture, than to apply it to the Ministry; in 1 Tim. i. 11. the Apostle acknowledges, that the glorious Gospel of the blessed God was committed to his Trust; and the same Gospel was committed to Timothy as a sacred Trust, 1 Tim. vi. 20. *O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy Trust, avoiding profane and vain Bablings, and opposition of Scien[r]e, falsely so called, which some professing, have erred concerning the Faith.*

FROM these Texts, and many more that might be mentioned, I think we have good Reason to conclude, that the Apostle principally intends the Ministerial Warfare, Course

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and Trust, tho' by a just Analogy and Consequence it may be extended to the Warfare, Race and Trust of every Christian, in which the Ministers of the Gospel are the Standard-bearers, the Guides and Leaders among the People, the Keepers of the sacred Rolls of Gospel-Truth ; not for themselves only, but to open and explain them to others.

LET us then consider distinctly these three Parts of the Work of a Minister, the *Warfare* he has to fight, the *Course* or *Race* he has to run, and the *Trust* he has to keep ; and when these are well weigh'd, we shall see what gracious Qualifications every Minister ought to have and to exercise in his Ministerial Office, and what abundant Satisfaction those will have when they come to die, that have acquitted themselves well in this great Work.

1. THE Ministers of the Gospel have a Warfare to fight ; every Christian is a Soldier of Christ, every Minister is especially so ; he is a Standard-bearer in this most noble Army. Now here let us consider,

1. THE Nature of this Warfare.
2. THE Graces that are to be tried and exercised in it. And,
3. THE Comfort and Joy that will result from it, when it is well over.

1. THE Nature of this Warfare ; concerning which, I shall only observe these Things :

1. THE Ministers of Christ in this their Warfare have not their Commissions from Men, but from God ; Men may be, and ordinarily

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must be the Instruments by which their Authority is convey'd to them, but God is the Original and Fountain of all their Powers: And from hence it follows, that they are not to manage their Ministerial Warfare, according to the Will of Man, but according to the Will of God; they are not to attach themselves to any particular Party in the Field of the Church, so as to injure or neglect the rest; they are indeed to keep closest to them that keep closest to their Commission, but they are also to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace. They are to consider themselves as listed under the general Banner of Christ, to promote his Interest and Glory, and not as under the Banner of any Party Men, how leading soever, to carry on little Interests separate from that of common Christianity. It is one of the first Stratagems by which the great Enemy of Christ and the Church, endeavoured to weaken the Power of the Ministerial Warfare, by sowing Divisions among the People about their Ministers, and tempting Ministers to set up for Heads of Parties. This Mystery of Iniquity began to work very early, I Cor. i. 12. *Every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ; is Christ divided?* Chap. iii. 6. *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but Ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every Man.* It would have been well for the Church of God, if the Successors of the Apostles would have been as careful to discourage such unjust

just respect of Persons as they were ; the Cause is not their own, but Christ's. Certain it is the Gospel Commission is but one, and it is from Christ, and is to be the Rule by which every Minister must manage his Ministerial Warfare ; and if he does not so, he striveth not lawfully, he is not the Servant of Christ, but of Man : and from Man, not from Christ, must he expect his Reward.

2. In this Warfare the Ministers of Christ are not Enemies to the *Persons* of Men, but to their *Sins*; and in being Enemies to their Sins, they are Friends to their Persons, for Sin is the Sinner's greatest Enemy ; and he that is an Enemy to mine Enemy, is a Friend to me. Foolish Sinners mistake this Point, they think faithful Ministers are their Enemies, because they reprove them, they threaten them, they muster up the Terrors and Curses of the Law against them, this they account an hostile Treatment ; with this evil Eye *Abiab* looked upon the Prophet *Elijah*, 1 Kings xxi, 20. *Hast thou found me, O mine Enemy?* And some among the *Galatians* were so far corrupted, as to think *Paul* was become *their Enemy*, because he told them the *Truth*, Gal. iv. 16. Sinners love to be flattered in their Sins, tho' it be to their Ruin ; but all will be convinced at last, that Flatterers of Souls are Enemies and Murtherers of Souls, and that they only were their Friends, that dealt plainly and faithfully with them, and knowing the Terrors of the Lord, would gladly have

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have persuaded them to flee from the Wrath to come.

SIN is the great Enemy that the Gospel-Ministry has to encounter, and this Enemy must not be spared, Ministers must reprove and rebuke with all Long-suffering and Doctrine, 2 Tim. iv. 2. Now Sin has so possess'd itself of the Affections of the Soul of Man, that you cannot strike at Sin, but Sinners take it as if you struck at their very Hearts; especially if you bear too hard upon the *peccatum in deliciis*, their darling Sin; to reprove this in Herod, cost John the Baptist his Head; and yet every Minister has it in his Commission, to fight against neither small nor great, so much as against that Sin, for that is the Soul's most dangerous Enemy.

THE Ministers of the Gospel are instructed by their great Lord, so to manage their Warfare against Sin, as that at the same Time they may shew their Compassion to the Sinner, and Love to the precious Soul; and therefore they are not to be passionate, nor satirical in their Reproofs; the Wrath of Man works not the Righteousness of God; The Servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all Men, apt to teach, patient, in Meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if peradventure God will give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth; and even when it is necessary to rebuke sharply and openly, yet the greatest Care should be taken, not to shew any Contempt or Prejudice towards the Persons of Sinners, but all over.

Tenderness, as a Father to his Children, that mixes Tears with his Rebukes ; such Treatment is most like to prevail.

BUT if it should not prevail, Ministers are to learn of Christ, to weep over harden'd preishing Sinners, *Luke xix. 42.* *If thou hadst known, even thou at least, in this thy Day, the Things that belong to thy Peace !* One would think no Heart could withstand the Force of such Compassion.

3. THE Weapons of this Warfare are not carnal, but spiritual ; for tho' *we walk in the Flesh*, we do not *war after the Flesh*, *2 Cor. x. 3, 4.* In this the Ministers of Christ are manifested, and the Ministers of Anti-Christ : Christ never allowed his Ministers to propagate his Gospel by Fire and Sword, by Racks and Gibbets : These are the Weapons of Anti-Christian Warfare. A Religion that has no innate Evidence and Excellence to recommend it to the Reason and Consciences of Men, must be propagated by Force ; and Men must be terrify'd and tortur'd into that, of which they can never be rationally perswaded. These are the Methods by which Popery has chosen to recommend itself to the World ; the *Smithfield Fires*, the *Irish Massacres*, have been the Weapons of the Popish Warfare in these Nations, by which our Enemies have endeavoured to re-establish their Tyranny over the Consciences of Men.

THE Ministers of Christ have no such Instructions, they are furnished with no other Weapons,

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Weapons, than such as are fit to convince and perswade reasonable Creatures; they have a Sword put into their Hands, but it is the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: And this they are to study thoroughly, and to preach diligently, *in Season and out of Season*, and not content themselves with calling upon the Civil Magistrate, to supply (by Force) the Want of their own Labour and Diligence. These Weapons will, indeed, require more Pains to manage them aright ; but then they will be much more effectual, for tho' they are *not carnal*, yet they are *mighty*, through God, to the pulling down of strong Hold's, casting down Imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God, and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. Such a Conquest as this was never gained by carnal Weapons, nor ever will be.

GOSPEL Doctrines and Precepts, rightly open'd and explain'd, and soundly and seriously urged and applied in the preaching of the Gospel, and all follow'd with earnest Prayer and Supplication ; these are the Weapons which Christ has furnished his Ministers with, and has many a time made effectual for the bringing stubborn Sinners to his Foot, and into the Bond of his Covenant.

AND if these were more constantly and diligently used, and less Stress laid upon Penal Laws and the Secular Power in all Reformed Churches, I am perswaded the Lord Jesus'

Jesus would take more Delight in them, and revive his Work more visibly among them.

4. THE Crown contended for in this Warfare is not earthly, but heavenly; as the Cause is not their own, no private Interest of their own, but the Cause and Interest of Heaven, so they expect not their Crown on Earth, but are well pleased that it *is laid up for them in Heaven*. They that strive for the Mastery here, *do it to obtain a corruptible Crown*, but the faithful Ministers of Christ, *an incorruptible*, 1 Cor. ix. 23. They contend not in this Warfare for a Despotick Power over the Persons of Men, and their Civil Rights, nor for a Dictatorial Power over their Consciences, and Dominion over their Faith; they strive not for Mitres and Titles, and Royalties, and large Revenues; the faithful Ministers of Christ know, *He that warreth must not intangle himself in the Affairs of this Life, but must please him who hath chosen him to be a Soldier*, 2 Tim. ii. 4. He conquers not for himself, but for Christ; those he conquers, he desires not to make his own Servants, but Christ's Freemen; and he expects not a Crown of Gold, but a Crown of Righteousness; to be accepted of God thro' Christ; to be approved of Christ at last, and to be where Christ is; to be like unto Christ, and see him as he is: This is the Crown that he aims at, and justly prefers to all the Grandeur of the World; and even when he has received this Crown of Righteousness, he does not take it as what is due to him, or deserved by

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him, according to strict Justice, but as the Favour and Bounty of his great Lord, and with the rest of the Elders, *Rev. iv. 10.* He falls down before him that sits upon the Throne, and worships him that lives for ever, and casts down his Crown before the Throne, saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive Glory, and Honour, and Power, for thou hast created all Things, and for thy Pleasure they are and were created.*

THIS is the Nature of the Ministerial Warfare. And now,

2. WE come to consider the Graces that are necessary for this Part of a Minister's Work; and here I shall not enlarge. One Grace proper to this Station, is Christian Courage, Zeal and Resolution; a Soldier must endure Hardness, and therefore should be of a bold and brave Spirit. *Paul puts Timothy in mind of this, 2 Tim. ii. 3. Thou therefore endure Hardness as a good Soldier of Christ.* The Christian Warfare will try a Man's Courage, the Ministerial Warfare will try it more; a Minister had need to have his Spirit raised up above both the Smiles and Frowns of the World; he must have the Rule over his own Spirit; nothing requires a more constant Calmness and Composure of Mind, than the Ministerial Warfare; a cool Courage is an excellent Qualification in one that has a Command in this War.

THE Ministry of the Gospel has always been the Butt and Mark of all the Rage of Earth and Hell; and the more Faithful any of the Mini-

Ministers of Christ are, the more Opposition they must expect to meet with. The great Enemy of Souls seldom fails to harrass the poor Ministers of Christ with his Temptations. I believe they are more violently assaulted than other Men, especially at their first engaging seriously in the Service; God turns this to their Advantage, for Temptation is one of those things that make a Minister; but in the mean while, they need a holy Fortitude to go on in their Work, when they feel such a Conflict in their own Souls.

We often hear the Apostle Paul speaking of his Temptations, *Acts xx. 18, 19.* *Ye know from the first Day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you in all Seasons, serving the Lord with all Humility of Mind, and with many Tears and Temptations, &c.* and *Gal. iv. 14.* Thus in Conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ, his Ministers suffer being tempted, that they may experimentally know how to pity and comfort those that are tempted.

VIGILANCE and Circumspection are Graces very necessary for those that are engaged in this Warfare, that they may neither be surprised themselves, nor suffer others to be surprised by the common Enemy.

THIS Circumspection is the more necessary, because the Enemy knows how to transform himself into an Angel of Light, pretends to be on God's Side, perverts the Scripture, pleads it against itself, assumes the Christian Name, and pretends to outdo every

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Body in Zeal for the Honour of God and Christ; sets up Images of them, and commands that religious Worship be offered to the invisible Deity by those sensible Representations; pretends to be the Vicar and Vicegerent of Christ in the World, indued with his infallible Judgment, and with his absolute and unlimited Powers; and thus, under the Banner of Christ, this subtile Enemy carries on the most desperate Opposition to his Interest, and to all the Ends of his Mediatorial Office: Here now is the Faith and the Patience of the Saints to be tried to purpose.

AND which calls yet more, both for Vigilance and Resolution in the Ministers of the Gospel, there is something of this Enemy even in their own Hearts, remaining Corruption, which raises a Civil War in their Souls; two Armies, two Nations, Sin and Grace, the Flesh and the Spirit striving in them; they have themselves to conquer, their own Spirits to subdue; and none knows the Difficulty of this Warfare, but those that have heartily engaged in it.

3. LET me briefly hint at the Comfort and Joy that fills the Soul of a faithful Soldier of Christ, when the Warfare is well over.

THE Conflict will not last always, but it will last as long as Life lasts, and we must never put off our Armour till we put off the Body; sometimes the Heat and Brunt of the War is over before Death, and the End is peaceful and easy, spiritual Enemies in a great degree

degree conquered, Satan bound, wicked Men restrained, strong Holds pulled down, Sin mortified, Fears scattered, and the Soul beginning its Triumph even on this side Heaven.

SOMETIMES the sharpest Conflict is at the last ; thus it was with the Captain of our Salvation ; *This is your Hour and the Power of Darkness, Luke xxii. 53.* and no wonder if it be so with his Servants ; but Death puts an End to all, then the good Fight is fought, and fought out well ; and then, everlasting Joy shall be upon their Heads. For,

i. THE Difficulty is all over. A Soldier's Life is a Life of Difficulty, his Work is hard Work ; the Work of a Minister is certainly so, if it be well followed ; the Difficulties of this Work are described very emphatically in 2 Cor. vi. 4. *In all Things approving ourselves as Ministers of God in much Patience, in Afflictions, in Necessities, in Distresses, in Stripes, in Imprisonments, in Tumults, in Labours, in Watchings, in Fastings, by Pureness, by Knowledge, by Long-suffering, by Kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by Love unfeigned, by the Word of Truth, by the Power of God, by the Armour of Righteousness, on the right Hand and on the left, by Honour and Dishonour, by evil Report and good Report, as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and yet behold we live, as chastened and not killed, as sorrowful yet alway rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich, as having Nothing, and yet possessing all Things.*

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SUCH a variegated mixed State as this must be a State of great Trials ; and these, when they are over, always afford the most pleasant Reflection.

2. THE Danger is over, as well as the Difficulty, and that is much more. Nothing distresses the Servants of God more in their holy Warfare, than fear of falling one Day by the Hands of the Enemy ; this Fear has sometimes so far prevailed, as quite to dispirit them, and tempted them to take up the Resolution, that they will speak no more in the Name of the Lord ; and if God did not give in gracious Supports, the Standard-bearers would often faint and sink down in Despondency. What Minister can bear the thought of having Satan triumph at last, not only over all his Services, but over his very Soul ? But when the Battle is fought, this Danger is over, and his anxious Cares and Fears cease, and give Place to everlasting Joy ; *I have fought a good Fight.* This is the first Account of the Work of a Minister, a holy Warfare. We now proceed to the

2. HE has a Race or Course to run. Here is a manifest Allusion to the Olympick Exercises ; and the Apostle often uses the Gymnastick Phrases ; particularly in *Phil. iii. 13, 14. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended ; but this one thing I do, forgetting those Things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those Things that are before, I press toward the Mark for the Prize of the high Calling of God in*

Christ

Christ Jesus. This Course of active Obedience and practical Religion, every Christian must run and finish, as well as every Minister ; the Apostle to the Hebrews calls upon himself and every true Believer, *to lay aside every Weight, and the Sin that did easily beset them, and to run with Patience the Race set before them,* Heb. xii. 1.

BUT the Minister has a particular Concern in this Matter ; for,

1. HE is to direct others in the Way in which they must run the Christian Race ; it is a Way limited and marked out in the Word of God, and bounded in on the right Hand and on the left ; within those Bounds they must carefully keep themselves, that ever expect to *finish their Course with Joy.* The Bible tells us what is Sin, and what is Duty, and it is the Rule by which we are to govern ourselves in the whole Course of our Life ; if we do not run by this Rule, we may be very zealous and very diligent, and seem to make great Speed, but we are never the nearer, *we run as uncertainly,* if we keep not close to the Scripture : There are bye Ways on both Hands ; on the right Hand *Superstition and Will-Worship* ; on the left Hand *Profaneness and Immorality* ; but the Bible is as a Voice behind us, saying, *This is the Way, walk in in it, when we are ready to turn aside to the right Hand or to the left,* Isa. xxx. 21. Now the Priests Lips should keep Knowledge, and the People should seek the Law at his Mouth ; not with an implicit Faith, but searching the Scriptures,

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tures, to see whether the Things their Teachers tell them, be so or no, *Acts xvii. 11.* The Ministers of Christ must not devise Ways of their own, and mislead the People into them, but they must open and explain to them the Ways of God, as revealed in his Word ; *the Prophet that hath a Dream, let him tell a Dream; and he that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully; What is the Chaff to the Wheat? saith the Lord,* *Jer. xxiii. 28.* Our own Fancies and Opinions in Matters of Religion, are but Chaff and Dreams, and should never be offered to the People as the Word of God.

2. THE Gospel Minister is to go along with others in this Way and Course of Holiness, and to go before and lead them ; he is to be *an Example to Believers in Word, in Conversation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity,* *1 Tim. iv. 12.* He is not to stand like a Mercurial Post in the High-way, pointing out the Way to others, but never moving one Step forward himself ; his Language should be that of *Isa. ii. 5.* *O House of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the Light of the Lord:* Not go ye, but come ye, and let us go together ; let a Minister be never so orthodox in his Judgment, never so clear in his Preaching, if he be not exemplary in his Life, he can never finish his Course with Joy. Too many satisfy themselves to call upon others to their Duty, and to commend them for it, and cry, *well run,* while they only stand by and observe the Motion of others ; but let every one that is called a Minister of

Christ

Christ know, he that stands by while others run, must stand by when others are crown'd.

3. HE is to excite and encourage others in their Christian Course, to caution all against sinful Wanderings, to strengthen the weak Hands and feeble Knees, to say to those that are of a fearful Heart, be strong; to this Purpose he is to set before them the Promises of God in his Work; such as these, Isa. xl. 29, 30, 31. He giveth Power to the Faint; even the Youth shall faint and be weary, and the young Men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their Strength, they shall mount up with Wings as Eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint: this is a very sweet and suitable Word to those that find themselves feeble and ready to faint in the Course of their Duty, and so is that in the following, Chap. xli. Ver. 10. Fear not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God, I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee by the right Hand of my Righteousness.

THEY must set before the People the Example of the Lord Jesus Christ the Fore-runner, encouraging poor Souls to look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith, who for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross and despised the Shame, and is set down at the right Hand of the Throne of God, Heb. xii. 2.

THEY are to represent, in as lively a Manner as they can, the Mark which the Christian

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is running to, and the *Prize* that he is running for, that he may press forward towards the *Mark for the Prize*: The *Mark* is perfect Holiness in Conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ; the *Prize* is perfect Happiness, in full Communion with the Lord Jesus Christ; and they are to put Believers in Mind of these Things, that as soon as they have reached the *Mark* of perfect Holiness, they shall win and seize the *Prize* of perfect Happiness.

THEY are to put the People of God in mind, that their great Lord has called them out to run this Race, as the noble *Grecians* used to call out their favourite Servants and Subjects to the *Olympick Exercises*, and to look on and observe how they acquitted themselves therein, taking their Honour to be concerned in the Event: Thus has the Lord Jesus singled out Believers from the common Crowd, and called them forth as his Champions and Favourites; and he looks on and accounts himself honoured or dishonoured, according as they acquit themselves in it; and this, when considered, must greatly animate the Christian, so to run as that he may obtain, for it is the *Prize* of *High Calling* of God in Christ Jesus.

THIS is the Work of a *Gospel-Minister*, as described by a *Race* or *Course* that he is to run.

THE Graces proper and necessary for this Part, are Diligence, and Patience, and Perseverance; for the Way is streight and narrow, here is no room for sinful Diversions and Wanderings.

MANY

MANY Obstructions lie in the Way, at which they will be apt to stumble and be turned aside, without Diligence and Patience; and the Time appointed for finishing their Course is short, and woe to those whose Time is at an End before their Work be done.

WHEN this Course of Ministerial Duty is well finished, it affords unspeakable Joy, for then the faithful Minister has answered the End both of his Office and of his Being. He has answered the End of his Office, and the Obligations of his Ordination-Vows; it was a high Character that was then put upon him, and a high Calling that was then given him, and a hard Work that was then undertaken; and many a pensive Thought he has had, how to act up to his Character, how to answer the Calling, how to fulfil his Ministry; and therefore when all this is done, and well done even in Christ's own Account and gracious Acceptance, the Joy must be inexpressible; now he exonerates himself of all the Burthen of Care and Fear that he has been so long labouring under, and now he returns to his Rest.

AND he has in this answered the End of his Being, and can with Comfort reflect, that he has not been a sinful Burden upon the Face of the Earth, that he has not lived to no Purpose, and lost the Advantage of his Days; he can humbly and thankfully take up the Words of his blessed Lord, *For this End was I born, and for this Cause came I into the World, that I should bear Witness unto the Truth,* John xviii.

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37. And therefore he has not, like the wicked and slothful Servant, any reason to wish that he had never been born, and to curse the Day in which he came into the World, desiring as Job in his impatient Fit, *That that Day might always be darkned, that God would not regard it from above, nor let the Light shine upon it, that Darkness and the Shadow of Death might always stain it, that the Cloud might dwell upon it, and the Blackness of the Day terrify it, that it might not be joined to the Days of the Year, nor come into the Numbers of the Months, &c.* Job iii. 4, 5, 6. An aweful Description of the Horror that will at last fill the Souls of those that have forgotten and lost the End of their Being. Now the Joy and Pleasure must be equally great that those shall feel in themselves, that can through Grace say, they have answered the End of their Being, and though not perfectly, yet acceptably in Christ, finished the Work that God gave them to do.

3. THE Work of a Christian, and especially of a Minister, is further described by keeping the Faith, or the Trust committed to them; *I have kept the Faith.*

By the Faith we are not so much to understand the Grace of Faith wrought in the Apostle, as the Rule and Doctrine of Faith committed to him. This is committed to every Christian; it is the Faith delivered to the Saints, and to be contended for and kept entire to the coming of Christ; but it is in a more special and solemn Manner committed to the

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Ministers of the Gospel, as a great and sacred Trust.

I. CHRIST has committed to his Ministers the *Rule of Faith*, to kept inviolable and entire. The Rule of Faith, you very well know, is the written Word of God, the blessed Bible, the great Treasure of the Church of God; this Treasure God expects his Ministers should most carefully and faithfully preserve; and how?

I. THEY are to maintain the *Authority* of the Bible, as containing the Oracles of God, and the Rule of Faith and Practice: Whenever the divine Authority and Original of the Bible is denied or disputed, as it has been in a very daring manner, by the Infidels of our Age and Nation, no Christian should think himself unconcerned; but those whom God has *counted faithful, putting them into the Ministry*, are especially obliged to contend earnestly for it, as they have Opportunity and Ability, both from the Pulpit and from the Press; but then this must be done in a Way suitable to the Spirit and Tenour of that Bible which they defend, not by calling for *Fire from Heaven* to destroy the Gainsayers, nor calling for the Thunder of Church Censures and Anathema's; for what have we to do to judge those that are without? as all those certainly are that openly deny the Authority of the Scriptures; nor presently calling for the Sword of the Magistrate to cut off those that trouble them, unless the publick Peace be broken by the Violence of the Church's Enemies.

BUT

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BUT the Authority of the Bible must be vindicated by sober and solid Reasoning, Sound Speech that cannot be condemned, that they that are of the contrary Part may be ashamed, Titus ii. 8. And God has always raised up those in the Church, that have been able to stop the Mouths of Gainsayers ; and there was never yet in any Age of Christianity, any vehement Opposition made to the Authority of the Scriptures, but they have been so well defended by solid Learning and Argument, that Truth has triumphed, and its Enemies have quitted the Field and the Dispute with Shame.

AND it is the Duty of every Minister to fit and furnish himself for the Defence of this great Truth, and to hold fast the faithful Word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound Doctrine, both to exhort and convince the Gainsayers, Titus i. 9.

2. THEY are to maintain the Purity of the Bible against all those that would corrupt it ; it is therefore highly requisite that they should understand the original Text, and be able to draw the Waters of the Sanctuary from the Fountain-head, and that at least in every Nation there should be such as are acquainted with ancient Manuscripts, that they may be able to discover any Attempt that shall be made by Men of corrupt Minds, to poison those sacred Springs ; indeed the Providence of God has been very vigilant about this Matter, and has found Means and Instruments to guard the Purity of the Scriptures as its peculiar Charge ; and the Ministers

sters of Christ should look on this as a great Part of the Trust committed to them. This was more difficult when any of the divine Oracles were delivered only by Oral Tradition, and before the Canon of Scripture was compleated, the Autographs collected, and authentick Copies given out; and therefore the Apostle saw it needful to press this very earnestly upon *Timothy* in his Day, 2 Tim. i. 15. *Hold fast the Form of sound Words, which thou hast heard of me, in Faith and Love which are in Christ Jesus; That good Thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us;* where it is observable that the Spirit of God dwelt in the Apostles and Evangelists, not only to enable them to indite the Canon of Scripture, but to keep and preserve these Inspirations, that they might be delivered to the Saints without Mistake or Corruption; but then this Indwelling of the Holy Ghost for this Purpose did not supersede their diligent Care, but assisted it and rendered it effectual.

3. THEY are to maintain the *Sufficiency and Perfection* of the Scriptures, as the entire and only Rule of Faith and Practice. Even among those that admit the Bible to be the Rule of Faith, there are some that will not allow it to be the perfect Rule, but set up something else, tho' not in direct opposition to it, yet as Co-ordinate with it and perfective of it: Thus the Papists have advanced, the Decrees of Popes and the Canons of Councils into the Place

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Place of an additional Rule. And some others have endeavoured to obtrude their own pretended Inspirations and Predictions upon the Church of God, as of the very same Authority with the Bible.

IT is the Duty of the Ministers of Christ, to contend for the *Perfection* of the Bible, that it contains in it all Things necessary to Salvation, and all Things necessary to Church-Communion and Order of Worship ; and tho' these Articles of Faith may be collected into a methodical System, and the Rules of Life and divine Worship, laid down in the Word, may be very warrantably drawn together for our Direction, yet nothing in the one Case or the other is to be added, diminished or changed, but every thing must be left to stand upon the Authority of the written Word.

2. OUR Lord Jesus has not only committed to his People the *Rule* of Faith, but the *Doctrines* of Faith, as they are contained in that *Rule*; these Doctrines are to be plainly and faithfully held forth by the Preaching of the Word ; and tho' none of the Doctrines of Faith are to be concealed, but the whole Council of God opened to Men, yet those Doctrines that are the very *Foundation* of Christianity must especially be inculcated upon the Minds of the People ; the Apostle puts a peculiar Mark upon some Points of Doctrine, *as faithful Sayings*, 1 Tim. i. 15. This is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the World to save Sinners; of whom I

am Chief; and so, 1 Tim. iv. 8, 9; Bodily Exercise profiteth little, but Godliness is profitable unto all Things, and bath the Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come; this is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation; and, 2 Tim. ii. 11. It is a faithful Saying, If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer we shall also reign with him, if we deny him, he will also deny us: And again, Tit. iii. 8. This is a faithful Saying, and these Things I will that thou affirm constantly, That they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good Works.

WHEN the Apostle calls these faithful Sayings, he seems to me to mean something more than that they are barely true, for so are all the Words of God, but they are Doctrines of that Weight and Importance to the Souls of Men, that every Minister is bound in Faithfulness to insist often and much upon them; such Preaching is faithful Preaching: That Minister that dwells upon these Foundation Truths, both doctrinal and practical, approves himself a faithful Minister.

THE great Doctrines of the Trinity; the Godhead of Christ; of the propitiatory Nature of the Sufferings of Christ; of Justification by his Righteousness imputed to us, and received by Faith; the effectual Operations of the Spirit of God, as necessary to our Sanctification; the Necessity of real and practical Holiness, and of worshipping God according to his Word, in the Name of Christ, and in

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the Communion of Saints : These and many
more the Church of God has always account-
ed *faithful Sayings*, and has contended earnest-
ly for them, and would never suffer them to
be wrested out of her Hands ; and from the
Testimony of Scripture and common spiritual
Sense and Experience of the most serious Chri-
stians, they have been recommended and hand-
ed down from one Generation of Believers to
another. These great Truths the Ministers of
the Gospel are intrusted with, both to keep
them uncorrupt themselves, and to transmit
to others that are rising up in the Church :
Thus Paul speaks to Timothy, 2 Epist. ii. 2. The Things which thou hast heard of me among many Witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful Men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Now the Graces that are proper for this
Part of the Ministerial Work, are *Wisdom* and
Fidelity ; Wisdom to discern Truth from Er-
ror, however disguised ; and Fidelity, to ad-
here to the Truth, how much soever op-
posed in the World. The great and fun-
damental Articles of the Christian Religion,
have been often combated and quarrelled
by Men of perverse Minds ; almost every Arti-
cle has had its Turn and its Time of Oppo-
sition ; and there is almost in every Age some
particular Gospel-Truth, that may be called
the present Truth, the Truth that meets with
present Contradiction ; and it is a good Thing
to be established in thy παράγοντες, in the present Truth, 2 Pet. i. 12.

FAITHFULNESS to Christ in keeping that Faith and Trust which he has committed to his Servants, will afford them a most comfortable Reflection, when the Trial is come to an end; there is nothing sits heavier, even upon natural Conscience, than *betraying a Trust*, being *false* to those that have *confided in us*, but Fidelity is the Honour of a Man, and of a Minister, and will be his Comfort living and dying.

THIS Trust is of that Nature and Consequence to the Souls of others, as well as to his own, that a Minister, conscious of his own Fidelity, has great reason to take Comfort: The Purity of Faith and Worship, is the Food and Nourishment of precious Souls; if these be corrupted, they convey spiritual Distempers instead of Health and Vigour to them.

AND since this Impurity of Doctrine and Practice, where-ever it is admitted, spreads like a Leaven, and eats like a Gangrene; those that have contended against it, and have kept the Faith, have therein consulted the Good of Posterity, and of Ages and Generations yet to come. Who knows not how much reason we of this Age and Nation have to bless God for the Courage and Fidelity of the Martyrs in the *Marian Days*, that would die for the Faith rather than depart from it, and would *keep* the Faith, though they *lost* their Lives; had they then basely betrayed their Trust, and given up the Purity of Faith and Religion, we can conclude no other, than that it had been lost in *England*, and we their Posterity

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had been nursed up in the filthy Errors and Abominations of Popery.

I SHALL add no more concerning this first General, the pleasant Retrospect that the Apostle had when he stood upon the Confines of Eternity ; he could look back upon his past Life and Labours with Comfort and with that Rejoicing that results from the Testimony of a good Conscience ; *I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith.*

AND now I come in the

II. PLACE to consider the pleasant Prospect that he had before him ; *Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the Righteous Judge shall give unto me ; and not to me only, but to all those also that love his Appearance.*

HERE the Apostle was able, by Faith, to look on Things unseen and eternal ; the Heavens were opened to his believing Soul, and he saw that which lay within the Vail ; and let us take his own Account of it, for if in such Things as these we give the loose to our own Fancies, we shall but discover our own Folly, and darken Counsel by Words without Knowledge.

1. THE Apostle had the Prospect of a Crown, an heavenly Crown ; a Crown is a glorious Thing, so it is accounted, though it be but an earthly Crown ; Men will wade through Fields and Seas of Blood to obtain a Crown, and yet they strive but for a *corruptible* one ; a Crown is the Ensign of Authority and Honour, of Plenty and Pleasure. When the Servants

vants of Christ have done their Work well, they shall be treated no longer like Servants, but like Princes : Matt. xxv. 21. Well done, good and faithful Servant, thou hast been faithful over a few Things, I will make thee Ruler over many Things; enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord. See the glorious Change made in the State of these faithful Ones, from Servants to Rulers : A Crown supposes a Kingdom, or else it is but a Piece of Pageantry ; the Crown that is laid up for faithful Ministers and Christians, has a Kingdom belonging to it ; Luke xxii. 28, 29. *Ye are they which have continued with me in my Temptations, and I appoint you a Kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.* This Crown and this Kingdom which Christ has appointed for those that have continued with him in his Temptations, are not like the Crowns and Kingdoms of this World, troublesome, thorny, tottering, fading Things, but easy and steady, safe, and such as cannot be shaken.

2. THIS great Honour he saw was sufficiently secured to him ; *it is laid up.* Where ? Why in Heaven, where no Thieves can break through and steal ; it is hid with Christ in God, not only so hid as that it cannot be seen, but so hid as that it cannot be lost, it is yet in Reversion, but the Settlement is so strong that it can never be broken. It is laid up in the Hands of Christ, he purchased it for his Servants, and he keeps it for them till they are thoroughly prepared to receive it. *The Inheri-*

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tance is reserved in Heaven for them, 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. And they are kept by the mighty Power of God through Faith unto Salvation, ready to be revealed in the last Time.

3. HE beheld this Crown as very near, Henceforth there is laid up for me ; from the very Moment that I shall have finished my Course, the Crown is ready, it was laid up before, the Kingdom was prepared from the Foundation of the World ; it does not begin to be laid up when the Servant of God has finished his Course, but then it will be brought forth and put upon the Head of the happy Soul ; he is no sooner unclothed of the earthly House of the Body ; but he is clothed upon with the House which is from Heaven, with an heavenly Glory ; no sooner has the Soul reached the Mark, but he wins and wears the Prize, that very Day he is with Christ in Paradise ; between Death and Heaven there's no Interval, either of spiritual Refinings, or of deep and dead Slumbers, but an immediate Passage into Glory ; no sooner absent from the Body, but present with the Lord.

4. THIS Crown is a Crown of Righteousness ; not that it is deservedly due to the imperfect Services of the Saints, but it is a Crown that Christ, who is the Lord their Righteousness, has purchased for them ; and therefore God can now bestow it upon them, without doing any Wrong to Himself, to the Honour of His Law and Government ; this is the great Excellency of this Crown : The Servants of God could

could not wear this Crown with any Pleasure or Satisfaction, if they could not wear it without Dishonour or Dissatisfaction to the Justice of God. Should Divine Justice behold them wearing this Crown with a dissatisfied Eye, it would presently become their Burthen, and not their Honour; but they rejoice in it as a Crown of Righteousness; and the Righteousness of Christ is the brightest Jewel in that Crown; and now they know not only that the Righteousness of God will admit of their wearing this Crown, but will be manifested and glorified thereby; God is faithful and just in putting this Honour upon them, *1 John i. 9.* He declares his Righteousness in pardoning and saving them; for the great Propitiation has thus provided, that God may be just, and the Justifier of those that believe on Jesus, *Rom. iii. 26.*

5. THERE is a certain glorious Day coming in which the Lord Jesus will give this Crown to his faithful Servants in the most publick Manner, in the sight of all the World; and this is the Day of Christ's Appearance, a Day loved and longed for by the Saints; then that Crown which before they enjoyed but in the *Measure of a Part,* shall now be given to their *whole Persons;* and that which before was done by a *more particular Act,* shall be done with all the Solemnities of publick Judgment; that Day, the Apostle calls it *that great Day,* so much thought of, so often spoke of by the Apostles and the Primitive Saints; *that Day* will be their Coronation-Day; Christ himself will set the

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the Crown of Righteousness upon their Heads
in the sight of all, both Friends and Enemies, and
will let all see, that they have, through Him,
a Right unto it; and this will greatly add to
the Glory of it. as now in this world
no6. It will be no diminution of this Honour,
that it shall not be given to some particular
Persons only, but to all those that love Christ
and His Appearance. as it belongs to all men
In this World the Honour of one Man is
thought to put an Eclipse upon another; and
that is scarce accounted any Honour at all,
that has a great many to share in it. Such
Emulation, Selfishness and Narrowness of Spi-
rit prevails at present in the Nature of Man.
But then the Souls of God's People shall
be refined and enlarged, made like unto the
Mind of Christ; the Rectitude of the Soul of
Man is then recovered and made perfect, and
some think that is the meaning of *the Crown of*
Righteousness; that as Original Righteousness
was the Crown and Dignity of the Nature of
Man in Paradise, so this restored Righteous-
ness, when it is made perfect, will be the
everlasting Crown and Glory of the Saints in
Heaven; Envy and Selfishness have then no
more Place in them for ever.

THEN they shall see there is enough for
them all in God and in Heaven, Fulness of
Joy, many Mansions, none will be straitned
for those that come in among them.

NAY, their Love to Christ will then be so
pure and perfect, that the Honour and Hap-

piness bestowed upon every Member and Servant of His, will be accounted an Addition to their own ; as it will be the Honour of Christ, the Head of the Church, to have His Body compleat and perfect, so it will be the Honour of every Member to belong to that perfected Body.

• AND it will be a particular Satisfaction to faithful Ministers, to see the heavenly Crown not only bestowed upon themselves, but upon the People, and especially upon those to whom they ministred in the Name of Christ ; the Salvation of these will be their Minister's Crown and Joy, in the Day of the Lord Jesus ; *For what is our Hope, or Joy, or Crown of Rejoycing ? Are not even ye in the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his Coming ? For ye are our Glory and our Joy.* 1 Thes. ii. 19, 20.

BUT the Joy of faithful Ministers will not be confined to those, whose Souls they were in a more special manner charged with on Earth ; but then all lesser Distinctions will cease, all particular Assemblies will evanesce into the one general Assembly and Church of the First-born, and their common Relation to Christ the Head, will in a manner swallow up all other Considerations. Such will be the Temper of the Spirits of just Men, when they are made perfect.

THIS is the best Account I am able to give of the glorious Views the Apostle had when he stood upon the Confines of both Worlds ; it is taken all from his own Words, and I

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hope I have not mistaken the Meaning of them; tho' I am far from thinking I have taken in all, that he had in his Mind when he broke out into this holy Triumph, *I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the Righteous Judge shall give me at that Day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his Appearance.*

THAT which remains, is to bring these Things home to ourselves by a particular Application. And,

1. IF the faithful Servants of Christ may have such pleasant Views as these, when they are leaving Time, and launching out into Eternity, what dismal Views and Apprehensions must those have at such a Time, whose Consciences tell them they have been altogether false and unfaithful? Judge of this by the Rule of Contraries, their Condition must be quite the Reverse to the former.

IF they look back upon Time past and gone, Conscience must tell them they have not *fought the good Fight, nor finished the Course of their Duty, nor kept the Faith and Trust committed to them; they have done nothing of all this.* Let us lay our Ear to the sad Complaints of these unfaithful Ones in their dying Moments, and we may expect to hear this doleful Language from them.

I have not fought the good Fight, I have been fighting against God, against Conscience
all

all my Days, I have been quarrelling with my Fellow Servants, and smiting them with Reproaches and Abuses ; but I have never heartily fought against Sin in myself, or in others ; I have yielded to the Power of Corruption and Temptation ; I have yielded myself to Satan, and he has led me Captive at his Will.

I HAVE finished the Course of *my Life*, but not the Course of *my Duty* ; I am as far from God, as when I first set out in the World ; I have not confined myself within the Bounds of the Word of God ; my Life has been nothing but sinful Wandrings from God ; I have been so far from encouraging others to run the Ways of God's Commandments, that I have discouraged them and thrown Stumbling-blocks in their Way ; I have been so far from leading Souls to Christ, that I have by my Example led them into Sin ; and now my Glass is run, my Time is gone, and I have not taken one true Step towards God and Heaven.

I CANNOT say that I have kept the Faith ; I have never from the Heart believed the Gospel ; I have said I believed it, and sometimes thought I believed it, but now I too late perceive my Faith has been but a dead, cold, and wavering Opinion ; I have not received the Truth in the Love of it ; I have held the Truth in Unrighteousness ; I have not held the Mystery of Faith in a pure Conscience. In Points of Doctrine and Divine Worship, I have had a greater Regard to Custom than Conscience, and to the Will of Men than

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to the Word of God ; I have not been faithful to Christ, nor to the Souls of Men ; I undertook the Charge rashly and inconsiderately, and have not kept that which was committed to my Trust.

THIS is a dismal Peal for Conscience to ring in the Ear of a poor dying Creature ; and yet this is the Truth of their Case, who have lived all their Days wicked and slothful Servants in the Family of Christ.

AND if the Retrospect be so terrible, the Prospect of what lies before them is not less so, but much more ; no Crown of Righteousness remains for them, nothing but Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish, the aweful Frowns of their injur'd Lord, much more dreadful than Death itself, *Thou wicked and slothful Servant, depart from me accursed into everlasting Fire.* I shall add no more, my Spirit fails in meditating such Terror,

I DENY not but while the Soul of a Sinner, upon the Confines of Eternity, has such dreadful Views as these on each Hand, God may in sovereign Mercy give Repentance, Death-bed Repentance, which may be true, tho' very late, and the blessed merc ful Jesus may pluck some such as Brands out of the Fire ; but I think such Instances are very rare, and it is worthy of the Wisdom and Holiness of God that they should be but rare ; and whenever there is any such, there is something more wonderful than that of the Thief on the Cross ; and if ever such are saved at last, they are brought

brought to Heaven by the very Gates of Hell, and so saved as by Fire.

2. LET us all heartily engage in the Christian Course and Warfare, Ministers and Hearers, that though we cannot yet say, the Battle *is fought* and the Course *is finished*, we may be able to say, our Warfare *is begun*, and we are in earnest *set out* for Heaven; if we can but truly say thus much, it will afford us Comfort. Others have fought it out and finished well, it is happy for them; and if we are indeed fighting against Sin and Satan, and all our spiritual Enemies, we have reason to hope it will be well with us; it's good to be in the Way, tho' we are not yet come to the End. This same blessed Apostle that now could say, *I have fought the good Fight, I have finished my Course*, could not always say so, no, not after his Conversion; at another Time you hear him speaking in another Strain, *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after: I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one Thing I do, forgetting the Things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those Things that are before, I press forward towards the Mark, for the Prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

3. WHILE you are pressing forward in your Christian Course and Warfare, fear not to fix your Eye upon the glorious Mark and Prize, this you may do without betraying a selfish or a mercenary Spirit; Moses had respect to the Recompence of Reward, and our Lord Je-

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sus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith,
for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross and despised the Shame. You can follow no better Example ; you will have need of all the Encouragements that the Word of God affords you. The Battle will be hot before it be over, we know not how hot it may prove in our Day ; the *Helmet* that must cover your Head, is the *Hope of Salvation*. Christ himself from Heaven calls upon his Servants that are in the midst of the Battle, *Hold fast that which thou hast, that no Man take thy Crown; be thou faithful to Death, and I will give thee the Crown of Life*, Rev. ii. 10. He holds the Crown in his Hand, and presents it to the View of Faith, that this lively Hope may inspire your Souls with Courage and Resolution ; despise not these Helps that he has given you. Why were the Heavens opened to the blessed Martyr *Stephen*? Why had he a sight of the Glory of God, and of Jesus Christ standing on the Right Hand of God? Surely it was that he might encounter Sufferings and Death with greater Comfort and Courage ; it would be spiritual Pride in you to think that you can be more disinterested in your Obedience than he was. Tho' the Recompence of Reward be not of Debt, but of Grace, it does not deserve to be less regarded by you, nor will it afford you less Encouragement, but more and greater : Fear not then, fail not, to keep your Eye and Expectation upon this Crown of Righteousness ; *For this Cause you will not faint;*
but

but though the outward Man perish, your inward Man will be renewed Day by Day; for your light Affliction, that is but for a Moment, shall work for you a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory, while you look not at the Things that are seen, but at the Things that are not seen; for the Things that are seen are Temporal, but the Things that are not seen are Eternal, 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17, 18.

4. LET us learn hereby to regulate our Sorrows for the Death of those excellent Ones, that in the Valley of the Shadow of Death enjoy'd these comfortable Views and Prospects.

THEIR eminent Faithfulness in their Spiritual Course and Warfare, approved by the great God, and attested by his Spirit in their dying Hours, should raise our Esteem of them, and should make us very sensible how much we are Losers by their Departure from us; a faithful Christian, a faithful Minister, is a great, a publick Blessing, the Death of such is a publick Loss; their Death is precious in the sight of God, and their Memory must be precious to us; this Age does not super-abound in Persons of such a Spirit, that we should part with them without an affectionate Sorrow and Sense of our Loss.

BUT then the comfortable Views which their Souls had, when upon the Confines of both Worlds, forbid our Sorrowing, as they that have no Hope; they were pleased at the coming of their Lord, why should we be displeased?

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pleased ? I know the Death of such Persons has not the same Aspect to this World, as it has to themselves ; to them it has a bright side, but it turns the dark side to us that are left behind. They enter into Rest, they are taken away from the Evil to come ; to them Death *is Rest*, to us a *Token of approaching Evil* ; but yet we must not charge God foolishly, but rather double our Diligence, that we also may be ready.

You of this Congregation have reason to rejoice that God continued your faithful Minister so long with you, and made him so Acceptable and so Useful to you ; and you have reason to be thankful, that when God took him away from you, he did not hide his Face from him, and suffer his Sun to set under a Cloud.

You all know Mr. *Shower* was naturally of a very tender and timerous Spirit ; it was the Grace of God working in him mightily, that made him rejoice in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and gave him a Boldness and Chearfulness, so much beyond his natural Disposition.

IT was very affecting and very encouraging to hear him, under the Apprehensions of Death, admiring the Goodness of God ; of this I am a Witness, when I enquired of him, how it was with him ? He answered with a Smile, *I am bad, very bad, but God is good, my God is very good, he is very good to me* ; and others can tell, how after he had a little recovered himself

out

Mr. John Snowe R. O. Q. C.
out of a Painting-Fit, in which he appeared
to be dying, he said, He could have desired them
to have gone, if it had been the Will of God; for
(says he) I thought my Soul was got about every
thing in this World.

SIRS, this was a great Honor that God put
upon your Minister when he took him from
you, and it should be a great Establishment
unto you; not only making his Name and
Memory precious to you, considering the End
of his Conversation, but obliging you to have
the greater Regard to his Prayers, his Ser-
mons, and all the good Books he has publish-
ed among you, for now you see you had in
them the real Sense and Language of his Soul;
he believed the Things that he spoke, and
therefore spoke them, and spoke them so fervently,
because he from the Heart believed them; he could
trust to that Gospel when he died, which he
had preached to you while he lived: Whatever
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July 1716.

BOOKS

48 A FUNERAL-SERMON for

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Mr. JOHN SHOWER HOGG

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F I N I S.

2 July R 1716.

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